For a 12-Cent Package . . . . . What's the Cost?

Cinnamon Trail Marked by Death

AS SHOPPERS for weekly or monthly lists of groceries, our curiosity is not unduly aroused at the sight of prim rows of small, undecorative tins of cinnamon for sale on the grocery store shelves. We do not stop to think, as we pop the tin into our basket along with other purchases, that our medieval ancestors would sigh with envy if they knew that the only effort expended these days in acquiring a tin of cinnamon is that of removing it from the grocery store shelf and placing it on our own at a cost of roughly 12 cents.

Cinnamon is a common commodity to us. In the spice family it is second only to pepper in popularity, plentiful and cheap. We are not reminded in our ultramodern shopping centres or corner grocery stores that one of the bloodiest episodes in colonial history occurred because of cinnamon, or that some of the most hazardous trade routes were pioneered in its name.

Often confused in early writings with cassia, cinnamon is one of the oldest spices known to man. It was once one of the world's most precious commodities and valued even in Biblical times.

The ancient Greeks placed cinnamon boughs in the temple of Apollo, and cinnamon was used in religious rituals of the Hindu and other faiths. Roman patricians, supposedly defiling a gift from the gods, were severely reprimanded for scenting their baths with cinnamon; while in Europe, during the Middle Ages, it was one of the main ingredients in black magic charms. Early medical books list cinnamon as good for toothache, colicky pains of children, cramps of the stomach, nausea, cholera infantum, and so on. Oil of cinnamon is included in the list of drugs in the first edition of **Dispensatorium Noricum,** published in 1546.

Much pain went into your pleasure . . . if you're a cinnamon fancier. There are some fine punches . . .

By VERA SCOTT

Today India uses cinnamon for dyeing calico and for medicinal purposes. In our own country it is used extensively in cooking and even as a perfume for soap. Its hot, aromatic flavor is found in some kinds of candies, chocolates, liqueurs and a variety of punches.

Several interesting toddies and punches using cinnamon are listed in Esquire's "Handbook for Hosts." One, called "Glow Wine," requires "two bottles of claret or other red wine, one cup of granulated sugar, 6 cloves, peel of half a lemon, piece of cinnamon. Bring to boiling point and serve at once with slice of orange." Delightful to sip!

The history of cinnamon is not so delightful. Until the time of Captain Major Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese navigator who discovered the sea route around Africa to India, Europe's imports of the "Spices of Araby" were drawn across Asia in evil-smelling camel caravans controlled by the Arabs, who made fabulous profits from their sales and told wild, hair-raising stories of how cinnamon was made, presumably to keep outsiders from being too interested in their monopoly. Only kings and noblemen could afford spices in those days and these were used not only to enhance the flavor of food but to disguise the taint when it spoiled.

Spices were more necessary to food then than now, and men, in spite of all odds, were willing to risk their lives to find them.

On May 21, 1498, after a voyage lasting nearly 11 months, Vasco da Gama and his crew, composed mostly of ex-convicts, anchored their ships off Calicut, India. Joao Nunes, a Jew who spoke both Hebrew and Arabic, was sent ashore to seek information.

CRUEL TRADER

One historian tells us: "Down near the seafront stood great warehouses, built to resist the damp, and bursting with boxes and bales and bags; silk from China . . . cloves, nutmegs, mace, camphor from the Indies, and cinnamon from Ceylon. . . .

JOAO NUNES was taken to the house of two Moors who accosted him rather impolitely with, "The devil take you! What brings you hither?"

To which Nunes replied, "Christians and spices."

Apparently the native Christians were not too impressed with the Portuguese. Da Gama's crew were a rough lot and da Gama himself was not a man of persuasive character. His lack of diplomacy, trigger temper, and callous cruelty brought minor reprisals he thought undeserved, and though after several unhappy months he was able to return to his own country with one of the richest cargoes ever recorded in history, his heart was filled with hate.

The sovereign lord of Calicut sent with da Gama a note to the King of Portugal which read: "Vasco da Gama, a gentleman of your household, came to my country, whereat I was pleased. My country is rich in cinnamon, cloves, ginger, pepper and precious stones. That which I ask of you in exchange is gold, silver, corals and scarlet cloth."

Da Gama returned to Calicut with ships and men and avenged himself with bestial cruelty while establishing a colony for Portugal.

An early edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica states that da Gama treated the inhabitants of Calicut "with a savagery too horrible to describe."

In 1505 the Ptrtuguese discovered Ceylon and took possession of it for the sake of cinnamon. The Dutch were the next to arrive, and, ousting the Portuguese, made themselves obnoxious to the Ceyonese by declaring it a crime to steal or tamper with cinnamon trees even if they grew on private property, because all cinnamon trees now belonged to the King of Holland. The Ceylonese refused to cooperate and sometimes whole villages were slaughtered by the Dutch.

The British took Ceylon from the Dutch in 1796 and the cinnamon monopoly passed into the hands of the East India Company, which taxed the export product so high it was driven from the world market and replaced to a large extent by the cheaper cassia-bark of French Indo-China and the Dutch East Indies. The stronger flavored cassia-bark is still more popular in many parts of the world than the milder Ceylonese product.

ADULTERATED

Before effective food and drug legislation was inaugurated in America is was usual for cinnoman powder to be adulterated with additions as unsavory as mustard hulls, minerals, cracker dust, starch, peas and even brick dust of the right color.

Commercial cinnamon is the bark of an evergreen tree, (Cinnamomum Zeylanicum Nees) of the laurel family (Lauraceae). A true native of Ceylon, the tree is also grown in India, Burma and the Malay Peninsula. Though some trees reach a height of 40 feet when full grown, the normal height is about 20 feet. Attempts have been made, with little success, to grow cinnamon trees in other parts of the world, but Ceylon still holds the true cinnamon market.

Pick a tin of cinnamon off the grocery store shelf and place it on your own. Its cost is roughtly 12 cents. One wonders what it cost India and Ceylon.

ANAGRAM ANSWERS

(1) EPAULET
(2) RECRUIT
(3) SERIOUS
(4) ISOLATE
(5) ASPERSE